

Clean indoor air is imperative to our health. While regulatory focus is primarily on outdoor air, studies show that the air indoors, where we spend most of our time, is often more of a problem for our health. Mold, pesticides, chemicals, airborne particles, smoke from cigarettes and fireplaces, household cleaners, lead dust, and noise all create potential hazards in indoor environments. Poor indoor air quality can be a trigger for asthma, which is one of the most common reasons for children to need hospital care.

**Indoor Environment:** Environmental Health Services responds to concerns about indoor environments by working to keep the air safe and breathable, identifying issues, determining probable causes, and helping to alleviate poor conditions. In order to promote healthier environments, we partner with many other agencies to address air pollution concerns, work with schools to prevent air quality problems, and respond to calls from home renters and owners.

An example of a project addressing indoor environment issues was the locally-funded Community Environmental Health Initiative. As part of this project, we conducted 36 home assessments and collected samples from 19 of the homes for analysis of allergens, various chemicals, and metals. Hypo-allergenic bedding covers, green cleaning kits, walk-off mats, and high filter vacuum cleaners were supplied where necessary. During this project, we also identified a neighborhood with a high risk for lead exposure, and with the help of GIS-computer mapping sent letters and educational materials to 180 occupants and owners informing them of the risk and offering assessment services.

**Noise:** Although noise is often an under-appreciated health issue, evidence shows that the stress generated from noise is hazardous to health and can affect pre-existing health conditions. Noise is usually defined as a sound you don't want to hear, over which you have no control. Environmental Health oversees noise control for those construction projects (e.g. highway, new building construction) in King County where an environmental impact has been recognized. Our job is to review, approve, and/or recommend noise management plans so that noise is minimized during and after construction.

## Program Highlight

### Tools for Schools

In 2003, we worked with 31 schools to implement the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools program. This program gives schools the ability to improve indoor air quality and create a healthier environment for children and staff. Collaboration involves an IAQ assessment and analysis at individual schools leading to each school creating its own IAQ program. Every school room is evaluated for carbon dioxide and other chemicals that may trigger asthma or other respiratory problems, so that steps can be taken to maximize indoor air quality.

**“Environmental Health protects people’s health and the environment – it’s a perfect occupation for someone who wants to give.”**

*Larry Brown, Health & Environmental Investigator  
Local Hazardous Waste Program, 16 years*



## Quick Facts

- Responded to 156 indoor air inquiries
- Provided 20 noise consultations
- Made six major presentations on indoor air quality
- Provided 19 residential inspections for the Seattle Asthma Project, a program assisting families with asthmatic children
- Coordinated remediation, evaluation and rehabilitation work for 80 homes as part of a HUD Better Home for Asthma grant
- Partnered with Puget Sound Clean Air Agency to produce a “Spotlight on Environmental Health” civic TV show on wood smoke and health

## DIVISION HIGHLIGHT

### Emergency Preparedness

In 2003, Public Health – Seattle & King County participated in the two day Top Officials 2 (TOPOFF 2) full scale terrorism exercise conducted by the Department of Homeland Security. The exercise involved radiological, biological, and cyber-terrorism disaster scenarios. Along with federal, state, and other local agencies, Environmental Health exercised by responding to a “dirty bomb” in Seattle. Environmental Health played a key role in planning, “playing,” and evaluating the exercise. The experience was useful in testing and developing new emergency response plans.

### Key Environmental Health roles:

- Participated in exercise planning and design
- Staffed three Emergency Operations Centers for 36 hours
- Created a Radiation Technical Reference Manual
- Provided EH liaison to the on-scene Incident Commander
- Provided technical assistance with public affairs and risk communication messages
- Evaluated exercise
- Participated in post-exercise workshops and debriefings